WOMAN IN CLASSICAL SANSKRIT LITERATURE

CHAPTER III
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The treatment of women in the classical literature is more or less the same as in the ancient literature or its developed form. Classical Sanskrit literature begins with epics and purāṇas. These have served as a source and inspiration for writing to later poets. Kālidāsa wrote his works based on the plot taken from these works, which also influenced him in shaping his women characters.

Epics

The Rāmāyāṇa

The Rāmāyāṇa (RM) of Vālmiki is considered as the Ādikāvya and model for later kāvyas. It is a reflection of society, its religious and cultural aspects and also of eternal values. The characters in it are dhārmic personification of human relations. Rāma, the hero is the personified form of sacrifice, dharma, righteousness, valour, compassion and devotion to father. It gives a picture of ideal state, king, man, woman, brother, friend and servant. Rāma is the ideal son, husband, king and man while Lakṣmaṇa, the ideal brother and Hanumān, the ideal servant. Rāvaṇa's life is an example for attachment for sensual pleasures and non-practicing of dharma. Women in the RM generally are slaves and fickle. Among the popular five maidens- pañcakanyas, (Ahalyā, Draupādi, Sītā, Tārā and Maṇḍodari) four except Draupādi are
the characters of the *RM*. Uttering the names of these maidens at the bedtime was instructed as a custom since at that time mind will not be in a condition to question and so they remain imprinted in the minds. Ahalyā is the beautiful oft-suspected and cursed wife of Gautama. Sitā was the abandoned royal princess, royal wife and royal queen lived in forest. Tārā was a victim wife of the rivalry of king brothers, who was compelled to accept and serve victorious husbands. Maṇḍodari lost husband, children and everything due to the over desire of her husband for pleasures. Draupati, the famous polyandrous woman, had to seek protection from another man in life and even in humiliation in the royal assembly. These five maidens are praised as part of propagation of the patriarchal ideologies and to fasten the life of people based on these ideologies.

The society depicted in the *RM* is patriarchal. So, son was considered as a boon. Fearing abduction due to physical weaknesses and frailties, society imposed strict moral code upon woman, the failure of which was treated cruelly. There are stories of abduction and adultery in the text like that of the 100 daughters of Kuśanābha by Vāyu¹ and the parents advised them to pardon.² The status of woman in the *RM* was not satisfactory. As a child, she had no history because she comes to the scene as serving wives and encouraging mothers of heroes. Her life in childhood was only a training period in her home, serving elders so as to equip them with the small world of house without any

¹ *RM*. I. 32. 33. 20-24
² *RM*. I. 32. 33
contact with the outer world. She was trained to think of a world with in the house, which limited her dreams only to romantic wedded life. If it was a failure, there was nothing to her for onward journey other than endless miseries.

All role models of woman are wives. The concept of wife of that period was personified in the three wives of Daśaratha. Among them Kausalyā was the crowned queen. She was wedded to beget a successor. Kaikeyi was the beloved one. Daśaratha was ready to sacrifice his power, riches and even his life for her.¹ Mantharā in *Ayodhyakānda*² says ‘intoxicated by your beauty you have always in your pride scorned the mother of Rāma, your co-wife’. Sumitrā was the slave not only of her husband, but of the co-wives as well.

Wifehood was completed by maternity. Kausalyā was famous and became an object of veneration not as a wife, but as the mother of Rāma, the perfect man. With out him she was nothing, though she served and loved her husband reverently and sincerely and succeeded in the existence of the race. She made her wifehood thus complete by performing the religious rites and by the family affection, the only divinity offered to an Indian woman.

Sumitrā is the character, who rarely appears on the scene. She became famous as the slave wife and the slave mother of a slave son, Saumitri. She had to support and approve the decision of Laksmana, in accompanying Rāma and Sītā in exile as their dutiful servant. She had

¹ *RM. II. 2. 34*
² *RM. VII. 30*
to console Kausalyā to caste out fear on the exile and wished for a bright future. In Indian tradition, the duty of the younger brothers was to obey the eldest one. This is expressed in the advice of Sumitrā, beginning with ‘Rāmam Daśaratham viddhi...’ Kausalyā and Sumitrā represent the model wives, who serve their master, even when they cease to receive token of love from him.

Kaikeyī, the valorous woman leads the story of the RM, like Sītā. The beautiful queen, who enjoyed all the favours from the king, though not necessary as a wife, accompanied him in a battle, saved his life, and obtained two boons. She, as mother to protect the rights of her son, wanted to send Rāma in exile and the coronation of Bharata as to fulfil the boons promised to her. It is reasonable to her to interfere in that as Daśaratha who was partial to Rāma, decided Rāma’s coronation in the absence of Bharata, purposefully. It was a conspiracy because Rāma was also aware of the fact, because he says Laksmana that the state was promised to Kaikeyī as rājaśulka at the time of her marriage with Daśaratha. She was ridiculed for her righteous demand.

Among the daughters-in-law of Ayodhyā, Sītā, the feminine manifestation of dharma was famous as the wife of Rāma, who received her as vīraśulka. She was endowed with all the qualities like chastity, faithfulness, moral courage, self control and heroic fortitude. She was popularised as the model for even gods. She was described as pativrata, mahābhāgā, chāyevānugatā and was given to become a sahaddarmini. She diverted the flow of the story by the abduction and was attributed by all characters like fickle, jealous indiscriminative and dangerous. Rāma,
though dissuaded first allowed Sītā, an expert in kingly duties,\textsuperscript{1} to follow, when she reminded him about his cowardliness of leaving her under the rival king. Īrmilā is a character, who was compelled to serve parents-in-law behind the curtain and remain under the rival king. She is the wife of Lakṣmaṇa, who helped Rāma to become a perfect man leaving her without uttering a word. She gives a picture of the status of wife in a royal family. Vālmīki hints to, though not expressed, her eternal union with her husband after exile and she became luckier than Sītā. There is no mention by name of Māṇḍavī, wife of Bharata and Śrutakīrti, wife of Śatrughna.

Maṇḍodarī, daughter of demon architect Maya, and Hemā, an \textit{apsaras}, became the wife of Rāvana on the condition that he would not act against her will. It was easy to him as the will of a wife and husband was the same. But wise Maṇḍodarī opposed him not even his relation with heavenly ladies; but only when he abducted chaste Sītā.

Tārā, the beloved and respected wife of Bāli and his inspiration, tried to retreat him from the battle with Sugrīva as she was aware of the fickle and deceiving nature of Sugrīva. She consoled herself, as it is the duty and fate of the wife of valorous persons. Rūma was captured and kept as his wife, which was a practice in ancient India. Repenting on his defeat, Bāli advised Sugrīva to listen to the advice of Tārā, whom he considered as his ideal wife, minister and master. Her diplomacy was evident from appointing her to consol raged Lakṣmaṇa on delay in finding out Sītā.

\textsuperscript{1} RM. II. 26. 4
Mantharā, the faithful servant and well wisher of Kaikeyī, who accompanied her on her marriage to Ayodhyā, proved her faithfulness by securing the promised kingdom to her mistress.¹

Ahalyā is the wife of sage Gautama, a victim of the rage of husband and the cowardliness of the passionate celestial king Indra. Initially, though both were punished, Indra was rescued by gods, but Ahalyā remained in oblivion. Anasūyā, wife of Atri, is the embodiment of chastity, with austerity and compassion being keynotes of her character.

The Mahābhārata

The Mahābhārata (MB), the longest single work in the world is generally recognised as succeeded the RM. The theme of the MB upholds the victory of virtue or dharma over adharma or evil through a war. The difference is that in the RM, it was between two different tribes while in the MB, it was between two branches of the same family. Since the society during the MB was patriarchal, no favour towards women could be expected. Naturally, the birth of son was celebrated. But it also contains stories of affectionate parents proud of their daughters like Draupadī ², Sāvitrī³, Damayanti⁴ as well as daughters like Lopāmudrā and Kuntī, adopted by Vallabha king and Kuntibhoja respectively. Gāndhārī begetting hundred sons wished for a

¹ RM. II. 107. 3
² MB. I. 167
³ MB. I. 190
⁴ MB. I. 220
daughter. It was an age of heroism; so heroic ladies were preferred to inspire heroic husbands and sons. Stories of Ambā, Ambikā and Ambālikā where femininity was condemned are contrary to this affection. Ambā, it is said, had to undergo penance for rebirth as a male to take revenge, as she could not survive in the society of male heroes.

While analysing the life of women, contradictory statements could be seen; but heroines had a fairly acceptable childhood. There were statements placing son and daughter as equal to that by Bhīṣma and Brāhmaṇa in Bakavadha. Devayānī and Satyavatī were daughters brought happiness to parents especially to father. However, only her son but not a daughter was eligible to expiate their family from the sins. Princesses like Kuntī, Śarmiṣṭhā, Sukanyā, Śikhaṇḍī, Lopāmudrā, Jaratkāru, Mādhavā, Gāndhārī are famous as they sacrificed their lives for their family to help the survival of the kṣatriya caste, destroyed by Paraśurāma. However, as daughters they enjoyed a relatively high status and happiness.

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1 MB. I. 115, 116 sl. 16  
2 MB. XIII. 45. 12, I. 45. 12  
3 MB. I. 75. 8-9  
4 MB. I. 219. 20, 21  
5 MB. III. 288. 6. 11  
6 MB. I. 75. 16. 22  
7 MB. III. 124. 25-24  
8 MB. V. 122. 18. 19  
9 MB. III. 95. 5-6  
10 MB. I. 36. 11. 17-18  
11 MB. VI. 13. 10-16  
12 MB. I. 103. 10-17
Education

MB refers to the samskāras, like jātakarma performed to girls without mantras with discrimination. So also formal education was compulsory to boys only. Education being in hermitages girls had no access thereto. They were trained in house so as to mould them as Virapatni and Viramātā and also in household management. The duty of educating daughters was assigned to mothers and she was considered as the best preceptor. In royal families, teachers were appointed; king of Virāṭa appointed a teacher to teach Uttara. Some princesses like Devayāni, Kuntī and Sāvitri were lucky as parents trained them. After marriage, mothers-in-law instructed the customs and duties of the new house. Husband was another preceptor who taught the moral codes. Yudhiṣṭhira and Bhima explained the importance of right education to Pāñchālī and Kṛṣṇa to Satyabhāma. Likewise, Umā and Suvarcalā had serious discussions on important issues.

Examples for scholars in sciences were depicted in the MB. Draupadī was an expert in political science, nitisāra, law and ethics and Gāndhārī in economics (arthaśāstraviśārada), they got a chance to study with their brothers Dhṛṣṭadyumna and Śakuni respectively. Subhadrā was an expert as driver of chariot. Śarmiṣṭhā was well versed in...

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1 MB. XIII. 123. 12-16, XII. 109. 16, I. 188. 14
2 M.B. IV. 8. 10
3 M.B. III. 287. 15-19
4 M.B. III. 277. 24. 25
5 M.B. III. 222. 32, XV. 44.507
6 M.B. IV. 204, III. 30. 35
7 MB. II. 25
8 MB. XIII. 127.134
archery and was carrying weapons though women were not recognised fighters. Thus, epithets like bahuśrutā, buddhimati, mahāprajñā, dirghadarśinī, paṇḍitā, sarvadharmajñā etc were used to qualify them. They could study from guests also. Kuntī was taught Atharvamantra by the sage Durvāsas. Though they were prohibited from studying vedas, by contact they were aware of it. Śakuntalā while reproaching Duṣynta used Sanskrit. During that period, the aim of education was to develop their personality by helping them to overcome their weaknesses through which they could help heroes. So they were acquainted with science, moral codes like Dharmaśāstra.

Conjugal life

Wife had a relatively high status and the relation of couples was considered as ordained by god and only by their union attained perfection. She was depicted as a true friend, a well wisher and a helping hand in all the fields of life. The house without wife and without her happiness and prosperity was considered as equal to a forest. Women were lived in husband’s house or with sons. Kuntī had to lead a wanderer’s life with her sons. But, unlike Sītā, Damayanti and Śakuntalā got protection in fathers house in their distress. The most meritorious duty of a wife was devotion to husband, being chaste, virtuous and dutiful and also keen about the welfare of her family.

1 MB. III. 222. 40-42, II. 48. 67-41, III. 32. 11-12, 180. 1-2
2 MB. IV. 2-4, I. 45. 31, III. 58. 27-28 and MP. I. 180
3 MB. XXII. 142. 4. fn. 364, I. 68. 50.4
Some codes were prescribed for men also. They were advised not to disrupt parents, wives, daughters-in-law and other female members of the family.¹ Like chastity of the wife, husbands were also insisted to follow Bhāryāvratas² and worthy sons were born only if both father and mother were chaste, by which the life of couple becomes fruitful. Husband considered wife as a life long companion and respected her to keep them happy and he was punished for not protecting wife or tormenting her.³ Protection of husband by wife was ridiculed⁴ or was considered as degradation. Bhima felt humiliated when they were freed at the instance of Pāṇcāli.⁵ He was not allowed to accept Sanyāsa without the consent of his wife. There were some restrictions in travel by husband frequently. The supremacy of men created anarchy. In the MB, Śvetaketu son of Uddālaka stopped the sexual anarchy especially of brahmins and established monogamy and monoandry and mutual fidelity of husband and wife.

Polygamy was well established and increased number of wives was a status symbol. Almost all heroes had more than one wife. Only very few characters practiced monogamy. Rivalries among co wives were also described as in the episode of Śarmiṣṭha and Devayānī. Kamsa had two wives; Asti and Prāpti, daughters of Jarāsandha. Kṛṣṇa was depicted as the greatest polygamist having sixteen thousand and eight wives. Though a divinity was attributed to him, it remains, still

¹ MB. XII. 235, XIII. 108. 1-3
² MB. XII. 261. 26, XIII. 194. 3
³ MB. XIII. 74. 13
⁴ MB. XIV. 93.22, XIII. 96. 22
⁵ MB. II. 64. 2-41
unbelievable, how could he manage them because jealousy, rivalry and hostility were the unavoidable characteristics of harem. But this anomaly was concealed by transforming the spirit of their attitude of love into devotion. Characters like Janaka, with eighty wives, Sanaka with one hundred, Śaryāti with four hundred and Śaśabindu with one lakh were also included in this text.

Being an encyclopaedia, this text also contained examples of polyandry. Vikṣi was described as the wife of ten Pracetasas and mother of Yakṣi. Pāṅcālī was the most famous polyandrist. This was accepted by the society and was justified by boon or curse. Yudhiṣṭhira justified this as a custom practiced by his ancestors.

Sati was not a compulsion, only individuals practiced it. Between the two wives of Pāndu, only Mādṛī not Kuntī performed sati; so also Duśālā mother of Jayadratha.

Occupation

Generally, women were not expected to earn money, especially belonging to higher castes. The money earned by women was not used for auspicious purposes as it was considered as ‘pin money’ used for household extras and luxury. There was no prohibition for lower caste women of śūdra and antyajas for earning money. They worked as servants, dancers, singers and beauticians. Since their social status was

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1 MB. I. 195. sl 13-15
2 MB. Mausalaparvam. 7.73
3 MB. XII. 24. 33
low, no stress was seen laid on the chastity of these workingwomen. Draupatī and Damayantī worked as sairandhris in courts. Satyavatī was earning money helping her father in rowing boat, her ancestral profession. Women as weavers and cowherds also are referred to in the text.¹

Rules regarding the property rights correspond to those akin with that of the MS. Women owned the right of property and gifts received during marriage; inheritance of father’s property was also referred to in the text. It also contains reference to the right of inheritance of father’s property to adopted daughters or putrikā.²

Major women characters in MB

MB belonged to the heroic age. Women characters also were depicted as heroic and as mothers of heroes. They helped father in the protection of children and also undertook the protection of children in the absence of father and as wives, followed husbands helping them in distress. Women like Pāṅcālī and Kuntī had actively participated in political discussion and even took decisions. But they never deviated from their duties as wives and mothers. Protection of wife was the duty of husband. In their failure self protection or protection from father could be sought, as in the case of Damayantī.

¹ MB. XII. 37. 23, IV. 15. 34, XIV. 69. 7
² MB. XIII. 45
The aim of the age was uplift of Kṣatriya community, destroyed by Paraśurāma. Hetrogamy or marriage with other castes was not strictly barred. It is very interesting to note that though the caste system was established, for the continuation of the dynasty, Satyavatī of lower rank and caste was not condemned but even reputed as the founder mother of the great Bharata dynasty. So it can be understood that laws regarding caste was explained in accordance with the situation or changed according to the circumstances. Heroic wives and mothers encouraged heroism and also harmony among the family members especially among co wives. It is true that women in the family enjoyed some sort of freedom but this was not the condition in a place out of the house. This is proved by the instance of Pāncāli, who was humiliated in front of the elder members of the royal family. This state of a woman in a royal family points to the unimaginable condition of helpless common women. Kuntī warns Pāncāli of the need of self-protection. The state of women artists and artisans, whose chastity was not insisted was very pitiable, which can be inferred from the instances of the attack of Kicaka and Jayadratha. However it was very difficult to verify the position of the women of common folk in the MB as it did not give much information about the life of common people and their living condition. Even male characters are popularised who go along with the ideologies of male dominated society. Paraśurāma was praised for even killing his mother at the instance of father. But Cirakāri, son of Gautama, who acted only after thinking well was not mentioned even in narration of the story of the MB The story of Cirakāri, which is just opposite of the
story of Paraśurāma, was kept unknown or not popularised. This might be because popularising this story would affect the practice of following husband and father blindly, avoiding mother. There are some heroic women characters, who became popular by their lives dedicating for the husband and his family.

Kunti

Kunti represents the group of viramāta, the mother of heroic sons. She was born in a royal family and bought up in another, that of king Kuntibhoja and the wife of the crowned king Pāṇḍu and lived as the mother of five brave sons. This intelligent queen, who was famous as arthaśastravisārada, well versed in politics and economics had to suffer a lot with her sons and daughter-in-law. As a maiden, she became an unmarried mother on testing the boon given to her by Paraśurāma.¹ She was compelled to choose pale Pāṇḍu in her svayamvara, which seems to be a punishment to her illegal mother hood and a victim of rivalry of co-wife Mādri. Convinced of her impartial nature, Mādri entrusted her the responsibility of her sons also. She kept her sons together joining them with a common wife, so as not to split themselves. Her tactics helped to regain the lost kingdom to her sons but loosing grand sons. Yudhiṣṭhira condemned her on revealing the mother hood of Karna and ridiculed the women folk as a whole. After regaining the power for her sons as a mother, she led a life in forest with Gāndhārī and Dhṛtarāṣṭra.

¹ MB. I. 104, III. 287-292
Draupadi

Draupadi, born from the fire as the daughter of king Drupada, and a scholar in political science, was bold who followed Pāṇḍavas as a shadow and was the spirit and inspiration behind the victory of them. Even if they could not protect her from the humiliation met from their enemies, she caused to free them from bondage. Without abandoning her feminine individuality, she maintained harmony among the members of the family and her will power helped her to overcome tragedies and even questioned the right of husband to sell her without her consent. She remained as a wife in the way prescribed in the code of law and endeavoured for the welfare of the family.

Gāndhārī

Gāndhārī, was extolled as a model wife, who kept away from all the pleasures denied to her blind husband. This blind couple under this pretext could succeed in capturing the kingdom. Instead of directing his blind husband and her sons, she acted as ‘blind’; not only that, her brother Śakuni helped her in the attainment of reign in a crooked way. If she were a real pativrata she would not remain blind, instead direct her family in righteous way.

Ambā

Ambā is a victim of love before marriage and heroism. She, who was taken away by Bhīṣma, for Vicitravīrya, was released on knowing
her relation with Šálva king. When she approached Šálva, her lover, he rejected her and on return, her father was also not ready to accept her. Then to take revenge upon Bhīṣma, who caused her destitute, she performed penance in the forest and it is said that she was born as Śikhaṇḍin, a eunuch, in the sacrificial fire of king Drupada and later caused the death of Bhīṣma. She was pictured as a eunuch as she acted as a male abandoning femininity. Society was not willing to accept a woman to kill a hero like Bhīṣma, though it was not impossible in that age of trained heroic girls, to defeat a valorous person like Bhīṣma and as such depicted the character as a Śikhaṇḍin or eunuch.

Sāvitrī

Sāvitrī, daughter of Aśvapati, got liberal education in luxurious royal family and so she became courageous, wise, gentle, adept [in the performance of duties] and respected by all. As no prince was ready to marry this educated and courageous girl, she chose prince Satyavān, son of exiled king Dyumatsena, as desired by her father. After one year, when Satyavān died, she followed Yama until ultimately Yama gave Satyavān back to her. The story of this noble wife shows that anything can be gained through chastity, devotion to husband and sacrifice, but it is to be noted that no story of a man who devoted his life to his wife was famous in any work in Indian literature. This story also hints to the fact that education was a drawback to woman for marriage and thus discouraging women education.
Indian literature extols mainly conjugal love and pre-marriage love is rare with the exception of Damayanti, Subhadrā and Rugmiṇi. Damayanti became a victim of the vice of dice of her husband. Though she followed him in his exile, he abandoned her in a lonely forest. After long sufferings, she reached her parental house and with their help, regained Nala, her husband. The importance of this story is that in that age daughters were allowed to stay in their house in a crisis. The story of SK is against this rule and practice.

Subhadrā

Subhadrā, sister of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma is an example of war and sport loving character. She enjoyed more freedom as the sister of Kṛṣṇa and was brave and bold.

Śarmiṣṭhā and Devayānī

Śarmiṣṭhā and Devayānī are important as the victims of the heterogamous relationship between brahmins and kṣatriyas.

Purāṇas

Purāṇas are considered as the historical work dealing with all the subjects in the three worlds. In number and subjects, they are very wide. So it is not easy to have a successful analysis of all the works of
this class. Hence, a general study of stray statements is considered here. The society being patriarchal, son was placed in the highest heaven. There were references favourable to daughters also. Thus, there are contradictory statements found in the texts. In Skandapurāṇa¹ (SkP) they are described as source of all sins², death, poison, fire, destroyer of penance and hindrance to heaven. Praising statements like a daughter of sound character and conduct was as good as ten sons, ³ putri as savour of parents from hell ⁴, good wife as real holy place for righteous persons⁵ can also be found. Childhood was favourable treating them with affection and in turn, they showed respect to elders; examples of spoiled and sagacious daughters like Devayānī and Śarmiṣṭhā are also included in them.

Reference to sadyovadhūs and brahmavadinis point to the fact that the education for women was not completely denied during the Purāṇas.⁶ Women like Pārvati and Aditi practicing penance and austere asceticism also were referred to.⁷ Remaining unmarried was a bar to heaven or salvation.⁸ Concept of wife is similar to that in Dharmasāstra.⁹ She is the wife, who is clever and efficient in house hold duties, who speaks in sweet words to husband, and to whom husband is the breath or soul and who is chaste. The ideal wife should act according to the

¹ SkP. VIII. 3. 163, VII. 3. 36. 39 and SkP. I. I. 20. 64
² SP.V. 24. 16. 21, Bhavishyapurāṇam.73. 13, brahmapurāṇam 101. 14. 15
³ MP. I. 154,157. P.V.Kane op. cit pp. 510-11
⁴ LP. I. 5. 31
⁵ PP. Bhūmikhandha. 59.22.7
⁶ MP. 20-27
⁷ MP 7. 3
⁸ SkP. I. 2. 39
⁹ GP sa bharya ya grhe dakṣa sa bharya ya priyamvada/ sa bharya ya patiprāna sa bhāryā ya pativrata.
wishes of her husband. She should try her best to serve all members of
the family. Submission to wife was censured; at the same time, the
concept of equality was also hinted there, praises the harmony in
conjugal life, which nourishes women, and by which she would not go
to another person even after her husband’s death. Generally, remarriage
was not accepted, however niyoga was not prohibited, but women were
not allowed to pollute sexually. It is said that women always remain
pure and whatever sexual sin they might have committed would be
washed off every month after their monthly period. Twelfth age was
considered as the best period of a girl for marriage and remaining
unmarried after puberty was censurable, which indicates prevalence of
child marriage. Kṛṣṇa made old maiden Kubja into a girl of twelve.
Instances of svayamvara and more or less effective voice on the part of
woman in the choice of mate, such as the episode of Kaca-Devayāṇī
could also be found in them. Marriage without motherhood would not
become complete, but widow mother was respected only as mother
and glance at her and her blessings were not considered as auspicious.
Husband, though physically mentally and financially not fit was to be
respected. A wife becomes beloved due to the good actions of previous
life and by sinful actions a woman becomes a bhāryā- bharanīyā. This
indicates to the two types of relationship i.e harmonious and

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1 VP. XII. 12. 13
2 SkP. IV. 4, VII. 44. 130, Agni Purāṇa. VII. 165. 6, BP. II. 47. 40, I. 58. 106
3 SkP. VI. 722. 47 and BP.72. 22
4 SkP. II. 9. 51
5 SkP. II. 9.13
6 VP. II. 20
heteronymous, between couples. One of the reasons for this might be the polygamy. *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa* suggests starting daily duties after adoring husband with chanting a *Sāmavedic mantra*¹ and then with flowers, sandal paste, like that of a god Viṣṇu². She was barred from visiting assemblies, and should be submissive in action, word and mind to her husband and should not express her emotion before him.³ She should remain well adorned and well dressed in the presence of her husband and in his absence should never to beautify or to keep herself clean.⁴ Unchaste wife was also, it is stated, provided protection in the same way to characterless husband.⁵ He is also advised to behave properly to avoid after death punishment.⁶ It is evident from the above that there were anti and favourable tendencies prevalent in the society commanding respect and compassion.

The life of widow was pitiable and she was expected to lead a life without worldly pleasures engaged in the worship of gods and not appearing in the public.⁷ Women had no eligibility to worship a deity independently⁸ and they were considered as at par with *śūdra* only.⁹ The injunction is that even if a woman is sinful,¹⁰ she should never be

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¹ *BP.* 16. 130-131, 135
² *BP.* 16. 136-142, 16. 84. 15. 17 and 57. 20
³ *PP.* *Srṣṭikhaṇḍa.* 47.56
⁴ *PP.* 16. 64. 66;*47ff ..
⁵ *MarP.* 69. 35. 37
⁶ *SkP.* 3. 121. 4. 6
⁷ *SkP.* I. 9. 61-65 , III. 3. 1, 22
⁸ *LP.* II. 20-21
⁹ *NP.* V 5. 9. 6, *SkP.* V. 3. 103. 22
¹⁰ *LP.* 178. 17
discarded, killed or sexually outraged. But, a contradictory statement is there in the Viṣṇupurāṇam (VP), in a conversation between king Pr̄thu and Pr̄thvi justifying that it would not be sinful but auspicious.

The concept of woman in the Purāṇas is clear from the general qualifications prescribed for her. The first and foremost is beauty itself. Truthfulness, nobility, duty, faithfulness to her husband, chastity, steadfastness, boldness, singing holy songs, being busy, excess of erotic feelings, sexual attachment, sweet speech are some among them. Garuḍapurāṇa (GP) contains censuring statements about women rulers. The country ruled by woman is as same as that of a country without a leader or ruled by a child. To Purāṇas, woman was only to be ruled—bhāryā, but not a ruler. Her world is strictly confined to his house and life in household.

Kāvyas

Coming to classical period, the writer, who comes first, is Bhāsa and then Kālidāsa. Works of Bhāsa contain very few female characters. Among them Svapnavāsavadatta is the most important. There the heroine is Vāsavadatta, the pupil and queen of king Udayana. Padmāvatī is also important, who had to undergo countless sufferings. Kālidāsa reverently refers to Bhāsa in his works. Others referred to by him are

1 BP. I. 58. 106
2 VP. strīvadhe tvam mahāpapam kim ...
3 PP. bhūmikhanda. 30-33
4 GP. 57. 13
not known now. So among the predecessors of Kālidāsa, only Bhāsa is considered in this study.

Bhāsa

Bhāsa is famous for his crispness in dialogue, action and all aspects of dramatic presentation. He became acceptable by portraying the characters especially neglected, belonging to various strata of society, from king to servants. These characteristics differentiate him from stereotypes.

_Svapnavāsavadatta (SVD)_ is the story of king Udayana, entrusting the reign in the hands of his able minister Yaugandharāyaṇa led a carefree life and indulged in worldly pleasures, like hunting during which he lost most of his kingdom. To recover it, Yaugandharāyaṇa arranged his marriage with Padmāvatī, sister of Darśaka, king of Magadha. So while they were at Lavaṇaka, Yaugandharāyaṇa set fire to the camp in the absence of Udayana and convinced him that his beloved Vāsavadatta died in the fire. The minister in disguise of a hermit entrusted Vāsavadatta as a companion to Padmāvatī with the name Avantikā. The king married Padmāvatī and could regain Vatsa kingdom with the help of Darśaka and Yaugandharāyaṇa revealed the truth to Udayana.

Vāsavadatta, daughter of Mahāsena was depicted as the respected and beloved wife endowed with all expected qualities. She, as a victim of the political strategy of the minister, prepared to face
humiliation for the welfare of the beloved husband. She had to initiate her husband marriage; even to wreath wedding garland for her co-wife. This silent suffering and the great sacrifice of this woman were appreciated. Because she remained as a puppet queen, not only in the hands of husband but his minister\textsuperscript{1}, followed the words of minister, as she had no other alternatives. This is clear from the expression of her feelings in soliloquy such as ‘\textit{āryaputropi parakīyah samvṛtta, Sakāma iva ārya Yaugandharāyaṇo bhavatu’}. These natural expressions are not expected from a noble woman in society, but condemned as feeble. Padmāvatī, the co-wife of Vāsavadatta is depicted as an innocent child. She is a product of patriarchal society, who enjoys, not offends her husband’s expression of greater love towards co-wife, which made her good, generous and considerate in society. This is a drama, which depicts the harmonious life of co-wives. But, Bhāsa expresses his concept of woman in a line ‘\textit{kānam dhīrasvabhāve...}
\textit{strīsvabhāvastu kātarah’}. No doubt, she is brave, but generally, woman is timid in nature.\textsuperscript{2}

No other works of Bhāsa depict the woman of timid nature, though his works contain few women characters. In \textit{Madhyamavyāyoga} the woman character is Hidimbā, a rākṣasi. Bhāsa chose her to avoid the stereotype women characters. Being a rākṣasi leading a wanderer’s life she did not want protection from outside. Attracted by prowess of Bhīma, she approached him and had a child. Though they are generally,
believed to be devoid of emotions, Bhāsa depicted her tender emotions.

In Pratimānāṭaka (PN), Sītā is depicted as a good wife and her union with Rāma as ideal. Sītā finds happiness not in attaining the status of kingship, but in their happy life. Thus Bhāsa, deviating from the work of Vālmīki, depicted Sītā with a discriminative power.

Mothers are revered. Kausalyā reproached herself for giving birth not to a loving son, when Rāma left her alone. However, this reverence depends upon her respect to her husband. The rule laid down by Bharata reveals the concept of a mother that a mother becomes not a mother due to the droha to her husband. Kaikeyī expresses to Bharata the attitude of mother to children that there is no mother, who will not pardon the fault of son. But generally Bhāsa depicted women without respect. In Abhiṣekanāṭaka, (AN) Laksmaṇa was in a dilemma when Rāma ordered the fire test to Sītā as he knew her faultlessness. Tārā, who was depicted as chaste, was ordered by Bāli to follow his words.

In Urubhaṅga (UB) there are no striking female characters. Only Gāndhārī and Pauravī are appeared on the stage as proud mother and wife respectively of heroic husband. Duryodhana says to Gāndhārī that he is praying to reborn as the son of Gāndhārī. Duryodhana tries to turn

1 PN. I.29
2 PN. III. 9
3 PN. III. 18
4 AN. dharmasnehāntare nyasya
5 AN.-mama vassānugamint bhava
6 UB. ahamabhitaputra-prasavini
back Pauravī saying that heroic wives of heroic persons do not cry.\(^1\)

Bhāsa depicts the sincerity in conjugal love through Udayana and Vāsavadatta, Rāma and Sītā, and Vasantasena and Cārudatta.

Aśvaghoṣa

_Buddhacarita_ of Aśvaghoṣa is the story of Buddha, a descendent of Ikṣvaku dynasty in twenty eight cantos.\(^2\) This work is important in this study giving a picture of _antahpura_ and women connected with men through this. There he tried to foreground the alluring aspect of women through the love sports of Buddha in youth. He happened to see an old man when he went for outing and detached himself from the worldly pleasures. Buddha questioned the authority of Rāma and Paraśurāma who were recognised as the righteous and stressed the meaninglessness of worldly pleasures. This questioning instinct made Buddha not acceptable to the popular culture.

Thus, it can be seen that the image of woman in literature was emerged out of existing world and moulded according to the mind and imagination of the writer. In every age, the way of putting woman has been seen primarily as wife, mother and sex object and their roles in relationship to men. Other than this, no role of woman such as individuals, thinkers, or even their mind or emotions are neither existent nor rear. In short feminist and anti feminist approaches were

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\(^1\) _UB_ I. 52
\(^2\) _Buddhacarita_. III. 48-49
co-existent, but the general trend was to suppress women in all spheres of life. These may be the reason for the absence of women as writers or any other intellectual activities. In Sanskrit, no woman writer is available, as they had no access to this language.